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**SAINT-PETERSBURG
IN THE BALTIC SEA
REGION**



The article describes the place of St Petersburg in international cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and the role of the Baltic region as one of the priorities of the international relations of the city. The authors show continual attention of Saint-Petersburg to developing international relations in the Baltic Sea region. The article indicates one of the most important areas of international cooperation – the participation of the city in the renewed Northern Dimension policy.

Key words: Saint-Petersburg, the Baltic Sea region, international relations, the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Union of the Baltic Cities, the Northern Dimension.

In the modern Russian language, the prefix “euro-“ has a connotation of “being good”. For example, “euro-refurbishment” simply means a refurbishment of good quality. The meaning of the word is quite clear to all residents of Russia — from Kaliningrad to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. At the same time every Russian region has its own word having a similar meaning of being good, not just denoting proper names or toponyms, but having a strong positive connotation. For example, in Chelyabinsk such a word is the adjective “Ural”, and in Krasnoyarsk — the adjective “Siberian”. In Saint-Petersburg this word is the adjective “Baltic”; it is often used here in the names of companies. Specialists in marketing use it trying to increase the demand for a product, and ordinary citizens of Saint-Petersburg are happy to buy “Baltic” goods and services from “Baltic companies”. The interest of Saint-Petersburg residents to “Baltic” goods had existed before the introduction of market economy in the city, and it is as strong today as it was back then.

The special place that international relations in the Baltic Sea region took in the international relations of Saint-Petersburg is not exclusively predetermined by the geographic position of the city. In fact, during the preparation for the tercentenary celebration in 2003, Saint-Petersburg had to develop its system of international relations, turning into a city of global significance. For almost a decade the Government of Saint-Petersburg, city businesses and non-governmental organizations, agencies, education, scientific and cultural institutions, as well as ordinary citizens have been successful in achieving this goal. Owing to these efforts, the geographical location of the city partners plays a lesser role in the identification of priorities in international relations of Saint-Petersburg. The city is actively cooperating with its nearest European capital — Helsinki, and with New York, which is located in the western hemisphere.

A much greater role in the development of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region seen as a priority is played by an unflagging interest of Saint-Petersburg to everything “Baltic”.

Such an important role of the Baltic Sea region in the international relations of the city is based on sustainable public opinion. Saint-Petersburg politicians and public figures are “father-founders” of the very concept of the Baltic region. In fact, even twenty years ago, the words “Baltic region” were not used either in world politics, or in political science. Saint-Petersburg supported the establishment of a number of regional and international organizations: the Council of Baltic Sea States and numerous institutions working under its auspices, such as the Union of Baltic Cities.

Today, Saint-Petersburg has new priorities, implementing new projects, such as the Baltic metropolis. However, the “Baltic” vector of the city international policy remains unchanged.

The birth of the Baltic Sea Region

The main characteristic feature of contemporary world politics is multiplicity and diversity of its actors. Long gone are the days when only states were recognized as actors in world politics, and all other parties engaged in international relations served as a “negotiation table” for states (or international organizations), or “tools” used for the implementation of state interests. Today, policy makers and researchers in world politics recognize the independence of international organizations in a wide range of issues. International organizations are independent actors in world politics. Besides international governmental organizations, some other parties such as multinational corporations, nongovernmental organizations, scientific, cultural and education institutions, as well as regions within states, and, finally, people are considered actors in world politics. Major cities should be considered important actors in world politics as well.

Such a diversity of participants significantly impedes drawing a “holistic picture” of contemporary world politics, forcing politicians and scientists to elaborate new approaches to the classification of its participants. One of the important approaches to creating such a classification is the regional one: world politics is divided into European and Asian, North American and Latin American, African and Middle Eastern. The regional classification is not rigid when applied to all participants of world politics with the exception of independent states. Nevertheless, the significance of the regional classification is great. For instance, it is believed that the Association of International Studies is an “American” non-governmental organization, although scientists from all over the world may be involved in its work. This belief was the main cause of attempts to create, starting with the Istanbul Conference (2005), the World Association of International Studies.

Methods of world politics classification according to regions differ in different countries. For example, U. S. policymakers and researchers identify the region of Central and South Asia, the Americans add countries of post-Soviet Central Asia to it, as well as Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives. According to Russian politicians and scientists, these countries belong to two different regions: partly to the region that brings together countries of the Commonwealth of Independent

States, and in part — to the region of Asia, together with the countries of North-East and South-East Asia. It often happens that in the foreign policy of a state, two countries are considered to be part of one and the same region, while in the foreign policy of another state — they are parts of different regions. Hence, the foreign policy controversies which occur when one state claims that in two similar cases the same “rules of the game” should be applied, while another state claims that these two cases belong to different regions, therefore, the rules must also be different.

Regions can change their borders. A state, previously considered as belonging to one region, over time, can “move” to another region. Some states temporarily “get stuck” on the boundary of two regions. For example, one cannot unequivocally say whether Turkey belongs to Europe or Asia. Alternatively, Turkey is part of the Eurasia region, together with Russia and the Transcaucasian republics. Studies show that even the same European politicians are constantly “confused” considering this issue, some arguing that Turkey is already a “part of the common European home”, and in some cases — that it was only “moving to Europe”. Similarly, over the past few decades, researchers have seen other examples of the kind -Afghanistan “moving” from the Middle East to Central Asia, and Australia no longer being a part of a separate region under the name of Australia and Oceania, and becoming a part of South-East Asia.

Regions may disappear. In recent years, specialists in international relations have been actively discussing the prospect of the so-called “West” region fading away from global politics. During the “Cold war”, the word “West” for the majority of the “Eastern Bloc” almost meant “an irreconcilable enemy”, but for most of the “western bloc” this word was a symbol of democracy and prosperity. After the end of the “Cold War”, the demise of the “Eastern Bloc” put into question the very existence of the West as a concept. Currently, two scenarios of the disappearance of the West Region are being discussed. First, contradictions between Europe and America may aggravate, resulting in the West region division into two regions: Europe and the Western hemisphere. This scenario seems unlikely. However, the growing contradiction between the “World North” and “World South” could lead to the disappearance of the West, and with no serious conflict between Europe and America. In this case, the North will replace the West.

Finally, new regions may appear in world politics. A striking example of this kind is the Baltic region or the Baltic Sea region. Twenty years ago, the Baltic Sea region was not even mentioned in the speeches of politicians. In scientific literature, the notion of “The Baltic Sea” existed only in natural sciences — physical geography, biology, ecology, and climatology. Political, economic, cultural and even personal relations within the boundaries of the geographical space, which we now call the Baltic region, did exist even during the “Cold war”, but they were not considered as a whole because of the “Iron curtain”. Only after the fall of the “Iron curtain”, the Baltic region emerged as a concept in social sciences and the Humanities, and soon this was reflected in the speeches of politicians. Saint-Petersburg, the biggest city on the Baltic Sea, was one of the first cities where the leaders began to speak about the Baltic Sea region as one of the priorities in international relations.

The role of Saint-Petersburg in the formation of a system of international organizations of the Council of Baltic Sea States

From the very moment when the Baltic region became an integral element of world politics, Saint-Petersburg has actively participated in regional cooperation. And when ten states, located on the Baltic Sea coasts, including Russia, decided to establish a regional and international organization — the Council of the Baltic Sea States — the Russian party made sure that a representative of Saint-Petersburg is always included in the Russian delegation at all the CBSS talks. A representative of Saint-Petersburg participated in the first Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Baltic Sea Region, held in Copenhagen in March 1992. It was at this conference that the decision to establish the Council of the Baltic Sea States was made. In June 2002, when Russia took the Presidency in the CBSS, Saint-Petersburg hosted the Fourth Summit of Heads of States of the Baltic Sea region. President of the Russian Federation participated in the summit.

Today the CBSS is rarely mentioned among the international organizations that play a crucial role in world politics. This organization was not mentioned in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation either in 2000, or in 2008. However, in the early 1990's the importance of this organization was difficult to overestimate. Indeed, despite the fall of the “Iron curtain”, both Russia and the West, felt a certain tension coming from each other. Russia expressed its concern about the enlargement of NATO. The West was concerned about such initiatives as the signing of the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty. Both parties had a certain distrust of interbloc organizations, “legacy of the Cold War”, such as the OSCE. There was no such distrust of new international organizations, including the CBSS, and owing to this fact, new international organizations can play a positive role in the development of relations between Russia and NATO, and Russia and the European Union.

Thanks to the initiatives launched or supported by Russia in the Baltic Sea region after the end of “the Cold war”, a favourable atmosphere was created in the Baltic Sea region for the development of regional cooperation at all levels of world politics. In contrast to the Balkan region, which in the 1990s became the epicentre of many ethnic conflicts in Europe, international relations in the Baltic region have always been governed by solely peaceful means. A new concept, that of “baltinization” emerged first in journalism and later, in the language of science as an antonym of “balkanization”. The term was introduced by the former EU Commissioner for External Relations Christopher Patten. Saint-Petersburg, including the city administration, NGOs, businesses, science, education and culture institutions and common people benefited from this peaceful character of international relations.

These efforts helped to establish many organizations aimed at promoting international cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference was attended not only deputies of the national parliaments, but also regional ones; particularly active were deputies of the Legislative

Assembly of Saint-Petersburg. The City Hall, and later the Government and Administration of Saint-Petersburg, participated in subregional cooperation in the Baltic region.

Saint-Petersburg became one of the founders of the Union of the Baltic Cities. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Saint-Petersburg takes an active part in the work of the Association of Chambers of Commerce of the Baltic Sea region. Overall, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, there are about sixty international organizations of various levels under the auspices of the CBSS. Saint-Petersburg as a city and its individual representatives are active in the work of these organizations.

It is due to the existence of these international organizations that it is possible to speak of the existence of a system of international organizations of the Council of Baltic Sea States, just in the same way one can speak about the UN system of international organizations. There were much more international organizations of various levels in the Baltic region in the middle of the 1990's, and at least in half of them there were representatives of Saint-Petersburg. Environmental organizations played a prominent role then. Indeed, cooperation in environmental protection of the Baltic Sea formed the basis of international relations in the Baltic Sea region. Even the CBSS was originally formed according to the geocological principle: only countries having rivers flowing into the Baltic Sea could become a member. For example, Norway having no direct access to the Baltic coast has been participating in the work of the Council from the very beginning. The same principle was taken into account when motivating the importance of accepting Belarus as a CBSS member.

Environmental cooperation in the Baltic Sea region helped Saint-Petersburg, the biggest city on the Baltic Sea and a major urban polluter of the marine environment, to significantly reduce the amount of pollutants emitted into the sea. In September 2005, the South-Western waste water treatment plants were opened up. These water purification facilities were built thanks to the investment and technology of the city partners in the Baltic Sea region, primarily the Nordic countries. And if in the early 1990's, the Russian coast of the Baltic Sea was considered to be the major source of pollution, today, this "privilege" belongs to the Polish coast. The only pollution points located in the vicinity of Saint-Petersburg and still causing concern are huge poultry farms that were built around the city back in the Soviet times.

New Saint-Petersburg priorities in the Baltic Sea region

Unfortunately, in the new century the system of international cooperation in the Baltic Sea region has become less concerned about the cooperation in the field of environmental protection. Firstly, regional environmental problems are not given primary attention. For example, a critical issue for the environment of the Baltic Sea is chemical weapons produced by Germany before and during World War II. According to the agreements signed by the anti-Hitler coalition allies, the weapons were to be destroyed when the

war was over. Originally tightly closed containers with chemical weapons were expected to be scuttled at the bottom of the Atlantic, but then the project seemed too expensive, and the chemicals were dumped into the Baltic Sea. During the “cold war”, the problem was practically silenced since the chemical dump was located just on the line of the “iron curtain”.

After the “iron curtain” fell, the problem was mentioned in research literature [19, pp. 93—103], and discussed at the second session of the Parliamentary Conference of the Baltic Sea region. Saint-Petersburg, where chemical safety is considered to be one of the main issues of environmental policy [8], made a significant contribution to this debate. The issue was raised by Saint-Petersburg scientists [1, pp. 4—8] and politicians [3], including those who moved to Moscow and started working for the federal authorities of the Russian Federation at the turn of the century. In the 1990s, the fact that the whole Baltic region experienced financial difficulties resulted in new challenges: Germany was going through the process of re-unification, Sweden and Finland were joining the EU, Russia, the Baltic countries and Poland were in transition to market economy. However, even in the new century, when financial difficulties had been solved, the problem was not given any serious consideration.

This problem has been re-introduced only recently, in connection with a plan to build the North European gas pipeline. The leaders of the Baltic countries, for which the construction of a pipeline bypassing their territory did not seem profitable, warned about the dangers of such construction, due to the fact that the construction work may disrupt the integrity of the containers with chemical weapons [1]. Thus, partners of Saint-Petersburg in the Baltic Sea region came to the idea that the chemical weapons should not be “touched”, because being intact they would remain safe at least for a while, but the problem would have to be dealt with by future generations. Due to its own demographic problems Saint-Petersburg pays considerable attention to health issues and preserving safe environment, and such a position is not considered acceptable. On the contrary, the construction of the North European Gas Pipeline is seen as an opportunity to partially solve this problem by attracting private investments.

Secondly, the priorities of the CBSS, as well as international organizations, working under its auspices, gradually shifted and it resulted in much less importance given to environmental problems. This change of priorities got particularly noticeable in 1995 when Iceland became a member of the CBSS, but Belarus was refused membership. The Russian party did not oppose Iceland’s accession to the Council, realizing that as soon as Iceland complied with the regulations of the CBSS, when the country became part of the regulatory framework of cooperation within the Nordic Council, it should have the right to participate in the process of elaborating such regulations. However, objections of other CBSS member-countries to the accession of Belarus, mainly based on violations in the course of democratization in this country, cannot but cause regret, because democracy is not directly linked to environmental issues.

Democratization refers directly to the issues of the EU enlargement, since only a democratic European country can participate in such integration.

The CBSS was engaged into preparation activities for the EU enlargement and changing the Baltic Sea status into the EU “inland sea”. This work gradually pushed the environmental issues aside and changed the accession policy which prevented Belarus from becoming its member. To Saint-Petersburg, the “Northern capital” of the Russian Federation, which is not going to join the European Union either now or in the long run, such prioritization of the Council did not seem favourable. This does not mean that Saint-Petersburg completely lost its interest in the projects implemented under the auspices of the CBSS. For example, the “Eurofaculty” project, which significantly contributed to the development of higher education the Kaliningrad region, was of a certain interest for Saint-Petersburg.

However, one can not help but notice certain decline in Saint-Petersburg’s involvement in the work of international organizations established under the auspices of the CBSS. For example, the work of the Union of Baltic Cities has aroused less interest recently. It can be explained by the fact that members of this Union are the Baltic cities whose population is one or two hundred thousand people, but often less. It seems that the interests of small towns are not fully consistent with the ones of big cities. Often the interests of major cities contradict the interests of the region they belong to. It is true for small towns located in the region. This does not mean that Saint-Petersburg is planning to reduce cooperation with the major cities of the Baltic Sea region. On the contrary, this is an area of new initiatives. For example, the project “The Baltic metropolis” [13] was launched in 2002 and it involves the capitals and large cities on the Baltic Sea coast.

Stability of Saint-Petersburg’s interest to international cooperation in the Baltic Sea region

A certain decrease in Saint-Petersburg’s interest to the work of some international organizations within the CBSS and to some cooperation projects in the Baltic Sea region does not mean the loss of interest in cooperation in the Baltic Sea region in general. Indeed, in Saint-Petersburg, “Baltic” goods, services and initiatives automatically get a positive image. A quick glance at the telephone directory of Saint-Petersburg shows that there are more “Baltic” companies in the city than “European”, “Russian” and even “Petersburg” ones [3, pp. 9—13]. That is why Saint-Petersburg supports the efforts of several NGOs to create a positive image of the Baltic region on a global scale [12]. Unfortunately, these efforts have not yet demonstrated the expected results because of some internal conflicts in the Baltic Sea region, and, in particular, because of the negative image, which Saint-Petersburg has in some countries of the Baltic Sea region.

The grounds for establishing a new region in world politics often lie in the understanding that the problems, shared by people living in a territory that is divided by national borders, are common and regional. The most urgent problems shared by the population of the Baltic Sea Region are environmental ones. But the list of regional problems is not limited to environ-

mental protection only. The region faces a variety of economic, energy and social challenges, difficulties in healthcare and education, and even in the military field, no matter how peaceful the nature of international relations in the region was during the “cold war” and has been since it was over [25]. At one particular point in time, the awareness of such issues attracted considerable attention of the regional community to the Kaliningrad region, which appeared to have accumulated all these problems.

Efforts of the Kaliningrad intellectual elite, and particularly of professors of the I. Kant State University of Russia [5, pp. 128—133], have improved the image of the Kaliningrad region over the past ten years. Today, Kaliningrad is not regarded in the West as a “concentration of all the ills” in the Baltic Sea region, and another place which could have such “nomination” is being looked for. Once Saint-Petersburg was being considered a suitable “candidate”. For example, some efforts had been made to significantly exaggerate the scale of certain problems of Saint-Petersburg, which are common to the whole Baltic region. In particular, at the turn of the century there was an attempt to represent the city as a “criminal capital”, both of Russia and the Baltic Sea region [23, pp. 121—123]. Five years later, there was another attempt to label it as a centre of ethnic conflicts, Russian and the Baltic “skinhead” capital.

Of course, some benefit can be derived even from a negative image. Thus, major Russian companies acquire small stakes in socially significant companies in Europe, for example, energy distribution companies. Then, mass media of these countries spread rumours that a Russian corporation is seeking to become the majority stockholder. The press and even political leaders of these countries make statements, in which they speak very negatively about the prospects of such a transaction. It seems that the basis for such statements is the negative political image of Russia. When the price of the company's shares rises, the Russian company, having saved on advertising, sells the shares at a higher price than it paid. But Saint-Petersburg is not seeking to profit from the negative image; on the contrary, it promotes a positive image of the city along with a positive image of the whole Baltic Sea region.

There are several reasons for it. First, Saint-Petersburg has already shaped a positive image of the Baltic region, and thus, its formation on a larger scale is possible. Second, the positive image of the Baltic Sea region is advantageous for Saint-Petersburg from an economic point of view. If consumers worldwide opt for buying more goods produced in the Baltic region, then they will simultaneously buy more goods produced in Saint-Petersburg. And third, people in Saint-Petersburg feel socially responsible both for the North-Western subjects of the Russian Federation and for the entire Baltic region. We have already mentioned contradictions between the interests of major cities and surrounding regions. It is these contradictions which make it impossible to merge Saint-Petersburg and the Leningrad region, even in the long run, despite the fact that some of Saint-Petersburg policy makers raise this issue time after time before the regional elections.

However, the fact that there are supporters of this merger in Saint-Petersburg, demonstrates that citizens feel their social responsibility. It

seems that it is this very awareness that allows the Baltic “vector” to remain a priority for the international relations of Saint-Petersburg. Thanks to the cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, Saint-Petersburg has been able to achieve much over the past two decades. Urgent environmental problems have been resolved. The political image of the city has changed for the better. Foreign investments have been attracted and a market for Saint-Petersburg goods has been set up. Cooperation in the field of culture has enriched the diversity of the cultural life of Saint-Petersburg, research and higher education have stepped on a new level. Today, Saint-Petersburg must and can “give” more rather than “take” from international cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.

Conclusion

Regions in world politics appear, change their boundaries and disappear. Twenty years ago, the Baltic region started to form around the Baltic Sea. Today it seems possible to state that the Baltic region is a reality, which is doubtless for politicians and scientists, not only in the Baltic Sea region, but also far beyond. For almost twenty years of the existence of the Baltic Sea region, it has been possible to resolve a significant number of conflicts, and to cooperate on many issues. Saint-Petersburg has contributed a lot to this work. At different stages the city has been involved in the formation and evolution of international cooperation institutions, both the CBSS and international organizations within its structure, as well as independent organizations. But most importantly, Saint-Petersburg has always been involved in discussing the Baltic regional issues, including, if the situation concerned, polemics with international institutions, which were established with its support.

Three years ago, international cooperation in the Baltic region entered a new stage. The Northern Dimension, which used to be an EU policy aimed at transforming the Baltic Sea into an “inland sea”, turned into a four-party policy implemented jointly by Russia, the European Union, Norway and Iceland. At some point in time, many scholars worked on the concept of a renewed Northern Dimension, reflecting on what it should be. Much has been done over the last three years. A large number of international projects were carried out. Today scientists should revise this experience and understand what the Northern Dimension has ultimately become. It is worth mentioning that the initiative in this matter was taken by Saint-Petersburg State University. The University suggested establishing a Research Institute of the Northern Dimension. Today, the idea has received support of the partners from other countries in the Baltic Sea region.

Saint-Petersburg and other cities in the Baltic Sea region, as well as Saint-Petersburg University and its partners on the shores of the Baltic Sea have always had disagreements about the role that the Baltic Sea region should play in world politics, and what role it is playing now. The authors of this article have only briefly touched upon some of them. Such opinion differences exist even today. Studying them will make one of the most impor-

tant tasks for the Research Institute of the Northern Dimension, which is being created today at the initiative of Saint-Petersburg. The very existence of these differences shows that the debate on the Baltic Sea region will continue, and it will be attracting policy makers, scientists, public figures, and the media. Continued discussion on the Baltic Sea region means that it will remain in the centre of interest, and consequently, will have reasons to exist.

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